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THE BATTLE FLAG OF THE THIRTIETH ILLI-
NOIS INFANTRY, AFTER HALF A CENTURY,
TATTERED AND TORN, COMES TO
MEMORIAL HALL,
SPRINGFIELD.

The torn, tattered, bullet shredded battle flag of the Thirtieth Illinois Infantry is back in Springfield for the first time in more than half a century. Three years of this time the flag was proudly borne at the head of the Thirtieth through many a stormy battle until finally before Atlanta, Ga., July 22, 1864, in a desperate, deadly hand to hand conflict, it was wrested from the Union forces after several color bearers had been shot down and many a confederate had been killed in his frantic efforts to gain possession of the tottering flag in the waving ranks of the boys in blue.

Since that time it has remained in confederate hands until November 28th, 1911, when it was restored to its friends and former defenders by survivors of the Gray. General Frank S. Dickson, the Adjutant General, has placed it in the memorial hall in the State capitol building with other pathetic reminders of the days of the civil war—the fierce conflict for the preservation of the Union.

PATHETIC SCENE MARKS ITS RETURN.

The transfer of the flag from Confederate to Union hands is one of the saddest and most pathetic stories in recent history. Elaborate preparations had been made for turning over the flag to Capt. E. B. David, of Aledo, the sole surviving officer of the gallant regiment. He received it. He attempted to speak, but in the midst of his

remarks the aged, gray haired veteran broke down entirely. He was so completely unnerved by the occasion that he could not continue. After vainly striving to speak he tottered to where the flag lay—the flag that meant so much to him, and beneath which he had fought so many times, had seen his friends and fellow soldiers mowed down—and buried his face in it and wept. He wept for grief as it vividly recalled to him those fateful days and for joy at a reunited country and the return of the old dear flag.

Its history was brought out at the meeting in Chicago November 28, 1911, which had been arranged particularly for the occasion. It was a joint session of Columbia Post No. 706, Grand Army of the Republic, and Confederate Camp No. 8. Large numbers of the blue and the gray—former foes, but now friends—met in the same room to participate in the exercises. Commander Garrard of the post, welcomed them.

MUSTERED IN AT CAMP BUTLER.

The Thirtieth Infantry was mustered into the service of the United States at Camp Butler, near Springfield, August 28, 1861, and here it was that the battle flag was presented to the regiment by the women of Sangamon and surrounding counties. They were particularly interested in this regiment for it was recruited largely from this vicinity. Many residents of Sangamon county were numbered in its ranks, and most of the remainder were taken from the counties north of here. It was regarded largely in the nature of a “home” regiment, and the women presented them the flag to lead them on to victory.

What the battle flag means to a regiment may be appreciated when it is known that every regiment carries two flags. One is the stars and stripes, the other the battle flag. The stars and stripes may be lost, may be captured or may be destroyed, and the regiment can get another

in fifteen minutes by drawing on the quartermaster. With the battle flag it is different. There is but one and when it is gone, it is forever, unless it can be recaptured from those who have taken it.

IN THE THICKEST OF FIGHT.

The Thirtieth Infantry was in the thickest of the fight before Atlanta. The rebel forces were pouring a deadly fire of shot and shell into them. They wavered and were forced to retreat. However, they eventually won the day, but when the losses of that memorable July 22, 1864, were figured up it was learned for the first time that the Thirtieth had lost its battle flag. They knew it had been captured, but when or how they did not know. Never again did they see the flag.

During recent years many captured flags have been returned by the victorious forces of both sides, but during all these years nothing was heard from the missing flag of the Thirtieth Illinois. Absolutely no trace of it could be found. General Hardee was one of the Confederate officers who played a conspicuous part in the engagement before Atlanta. He died a short time ago, and his effects were examined by his daughter. Among them was a box filled with war relics and among these relics was the battle flag of the Thirtieth Illinois.

Accompanying the flag was a note telling of its capture. It showed the desperate struggle members of the Thirtieth had made to save the flag, how color sergeant after color sergeant was shot down, and how Confederate after Confederate was killed before it was finally captured by Private John C. Leird, of Co. A, Twenty-seventh Tennessee Infantry, C. S. A. The story told of its being bathed in blood. Gen. Hardee's daughter began a correspondence in regard to the flag, and finally discovered that Private Leird was still alive and living in Tennessee.

She presented him with the flag, which he in turn forwarded to Confederate Camp No. 8, of Chicago, with the request that it be restored to its original owners.

A band escorted the flag into the joint meeting and a reception was held about it. Col. W. E. Poulson, of Confederate Camp No. 8, presented the flag to Capt. David. The latter accepted it, attempted to speak, but failed and handed it to the Adjutant General, Frank S. Dickson. The latter in officially accepting it on behalf of the State of Illinois, traced some of its thrilling history, told of the great meaning of the occasion, and promised that the flag would rest with other battle flags in Memorial Hall.